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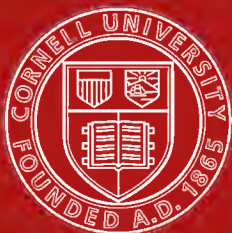
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BULLETIN

THE COLLEGE CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH
in the
CENTRAL ATLANTIC STATES

Number 1

January, 1921



THE BIBLE AND THE CLASSICS AS A LITERARY BACKGROUND

ADDRESSES

DELIVERED AT THE MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE
AT THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY ON NOVEM-
BER 27, 1920



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The Bible and the Classics as a Literary Background

By Walter S. Hinchman, Haverford College

All teachers of English are familiar with the young man who admits no recognition when he comes upon such a line as

“she would have ta'en

Achilles by the hair and bent his neck;”

with the other young man who hears behind Tennyson's -

“Push off, and sitting well in order smite

The sounding furrows”

no echo of Virgilian phrase; and with the third gentleman who is surprised that he should be expected to know whom Milton could possibly have had in mind when he spoke of

“That shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed”
from “the secret top of Oreb or of Sinai.” These young people, for they are not all of one sex, are merely symbols of an ignorance which goes a long way towards making Milton—to mention the chief among many—a shut book to the modern world. There is a story that a professor at one of our largest universities discovered that no one in a group of Juniors and Seniors could identify Judas Iscariot; exasperated, he cried out: “Gentlemen, is there anyone in the room who has heard of Jesus Christ!” The fact that one student took the question seriously and raised his hand is humorous, if you like; but the story, as Carlyle would have said, is “significant of much.” The obvious argument, drawn from the facts, is that English teachers should encourage, perhaps demand, at least a bowing acquaintance with the two chief sources of allusions in English literature.

But this argument does not appeal to me, for two reasons. In the first place, though I agree that such acquaintance on the part of the student would help, it happens that the Classics which the majority of our students study do not by any means supply them with the information necessary to an identification of the greater number of the allusions in their English literature. Those who have been through enough Cæsar, Virgil, and Cicero to pass the

entrance examinations appear to be sure of only the very commonest names, such as Achilles, Aeneas, Juno. If they do get something of the force in the line,

“she could have ta'en

Achilles by the hair and bent his neck,”

they are usually put to rout by the very next verse:

“Or with a finger stay'd Ixion's wheel.”

The same thing is true to some extent of what they retain of the Bible. Moses, David, and Job can still be identified, if not with precision, but such important figures as Rebecca and Ruth, Joshua and Samuel are little more than names. In the next place, so far as this informational plea is concerned, I believe too heartily in the value of the Classics and of the Bible, both for themselves and for their usefulness as literary backgrounds, to be content when their champions rest the case with this and associated arguments. Such a feeble contention as that the Classics and the Bible supply the student with indispensable information, together with the mental discipline argument for the one and the moral argument for the other, has done much, to my mind, to discredit both. It proves too little; it raises the damaging suspicion that all has been said. Furthermore, the ground of this argument has been well ploughed and salted. It does not seem profitable to consume another half-hour in citing an imposing list of passages which Milton and others have taken from the Bible and the Classics.

Much the same fault may be found with the etymology theory. It is desirable, of course, that our students should have a nice sense for shades of meaning, that they should know, for example, what Stevenson means by “a fine series of accidents in the day's career;” but unless they are fairly steeped in the Classics, they do not seem to accumulate from their work a sufficient inheritance to justify, for this alone, the study of Greek and Latin. What I mean is that I am not convinced that a boy or girl who has studied Latin is any more likely than one who has not to refrain from using “aggravate” in the sense of “provoke” or to give the proper meaning to “horrid” when Satan with bold words broke “the horrid silence.” At all events, though I recognize the value of both the information and the etymology theories, I feel that we must rest our case for the Classics on more secure grounds.

Just now I have been speaking exclusively about Latin and Greek. If we consider for a moment two arguments in favor of the Bible, we may find, I think, that the main contentions in its favor are in reality the chief arguments for the Classics. The second in point of acquisition I mention first because it is the more familiar.

I refer to a feeling for what the French compactly call "phrase." Illustration is hardly necessary; we all recognize that the simple language of our English Bible is woven into the pattern of our best English style, into the writings of Dryden and Swift, as well as those of Bunyan; of Maculay and Ruskin, as well as those of Lincoln. I can think of no better antidote for the lure of cheap literature than the feeling of simple dignity which must gradually possess the mind of a man who reads his Bible aloud, or hears it read,—not for information, not for moral solace (proper and fitting as these may be), but for the vividness, restraint, and harmony of the language. In other words, it is not merely that the reader should be able to identify Biblical allusions which abound in Bacon, Milton, Bunyan, and others; it is rather that he should recognize a familiar Biblical inheritance in such sentences as the following: "And mysteries and presences, innumerable, of living things,—these may yet be here your riches; untormenting and divine; serviceable for the life that now is; nor, it may be, without promise of that which is to come."

What is the virtue in this reminiscence of the Biblical phrase? What is its peculiar value? The psychology of it is rather elusive; but we can at least *feel* its value if we cannot always explain it. Somehow such style seems the breath of life to what DeQuincey called the "literature of power." A recent critic of Shakespeare, in pointing out that certain ideas and emotions need appropriate language, that language, in point of fact, informs thought almost as much as thought prescribes language, has used the phrase, "corresponding speech." If Hamlet, in his last words to Horatio, must break into the "sheer splendour of speech," in order that the words may "correspond" to the emotion, so the inheritors of our Biblical language may be said to accomplish the sheer *dignity* of utterance, the only speech which exactly "corresponds" to the simplicity and "high seriousness" of their thought.

The other argument I wish to emphasize springs from the fact that the English and American people have not only a peculiar literary inheritance in Biblical style, but an equally unique moral and intellectual inheritance. Overdrawn as John Richard Green's picture may be when he says that England in the seventeenth century became a nation of one book, we do not have to remind ourselves that not merely our religious distinctions, but in large measure the current of our moral and intellectual life, even today, springs from the absorption of our ancestors in the Bible. In the seventeenth century it dominated a great part of our literature, of Jeremy Taylor as well as of Bunyan; in the eighteenth, it fed the evangelical reaction against a tottering rationalism; and it became the ark and the covenant of the entrenched religions in Victorian days. Indeed, much of the literature of the past three centuries

must remain meaningless to those who are unfamiliar with the book which gave it not only style but substance. A foreigner may well question George Eliot's art; novels, he might say, should not make us feel that their be-all and end-all is morality. But English readers know that George Eliot was doing the most natural thing in the world for an English person, that she was following a tradition stronger than herself. Similarly, our popular criticism of literature is frequently governed by the same inheritance: witness the praise long given to the poetry of Longfellow because it enunciates moral comfort; the "Psalm of Life," a commonplace piece of work, is far better known than a greater piece of writing like "The Skeleton in Armor." Or, to take an example of how the tradition directed hostile criticism, recall the conviction with which Englishmen assumed that the poetry of Byron must be bad, as poetry, because they did not approve of his life; the *Weltgeist* Goethe, or their own Swinburne, a questionable person, might praise Byron's poetry in vain; it was not till Matthew Arnold, of unquestionable probity, insisted that it had great merit that they were able to see its "splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength."

Now the same arguments that support a study of the Bible for literary backgrounds,—that is, to develop appreciation of the style and understanding of the meaning of the English literature written during the past three centuries,—seem to me the very reasons why our students should study the Classics for background purposes. The case for style is simple and obvious enough, however complicated an analysis of the ingredients may be. From Bacon to Tennyson the classical turn of phrase permeates our best literature. The objection still raised in some quarters is not to the fact, and the value of such study in order to appreciate English style is not seriously questioned; but there is a widespread contention that translations of the Classics are sufficient. I wonder whether it is still necessary to lay that ghost. There is a story that once when the Paris cabmen had agreed not to turn a wheel during lunch hour, a lady in distress on a rainy day besought a gallant driver to make just one exception. He could not bear to cause the lady displeasure or pain, but he must obey the Union rules. He protested that, as for himself, he would be only too glad to oblige a lady; in fact, nothing gave him more discomfort than to appear discourteous to a lady; "but," he added daintily, —"*mais mon petit estomac, il ne le veut pas.*" Turn that answer into English, German,— any language you like,—it will not pass muster; it is wholly French and must be said in French. How shall we hope to give our students a sense for the felicity of Virgilian phrase or for the periodicity of Cicero through translation, through circumlocution and paraphrase? Tennyson himself, with all his happy

gift of translation, does not attempt to render "venusta," hopelessly beyond even him, in his lines to Catullus and "olive-silvery Sirmio:"

"Row us out from Desenzano, to your Sirmione row!

So they row'd, and there we landed—"O venusta Sirmio!" "

The other point, that of our intellectual inheritance, is more complicated because the resultant of the Bible tradition and the Classical tradition is a mixture of similarities and contradictions. There is no need, even if there were time, to give the present company a detailed account of the influence of these two sets of writings on the thinking of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or of the composite result in the nineteenth century, but it may be well to remind ourselves of the more outstanding features, if only to see the whole problem in connection with the study of the Bible and the Classics, and to appreciate the force of the argument in their favor.

The interest in the phenomena and natural laws of this world, an interest naturally bred of the humanistic development in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gives us, as every schoolboy knows, a clear beginning for what we call modern science and marks an equally clear departure from the mysterious formulae of the Middle Ages. The development of a rationalistic philosophy and out of that of an easy-going secularism is also an obvious consequence. Following this line of development, we find many phases of the middle eighteenth century clear as crystal. It is not perturbing, either, to meet a counter-Renaissance, with a gradually gathering Puritanism and a later Evangelicalism to step in when it had run its course. Nor does it surprise us to find the strong Bible tradition joining hands with an off-shoot of the fundamentally hostile Classical tradition and making humanitarianism out of humanism. We can move serenely enough through these phases to the Age of Romanticism, with its strong humanitarian color. But when we begin to set an isolated Humanitarianism against Humanism, or Romanticism *per se* against Classicism *per se*, we find ourselves in a somewhat academic and futile exercise. We discover, in fact, that these two phases of our development are not isolated, but complexly blended; that the two do not run parallel nor yet succeed one another; that both inheritances, incongruously enough, have during the nineteenth century become inseparable companions. What is more, though Humanism and Humanitarianism, Rationalism and Transcendentalism,—and other large terms—may be convenient philosophic labels, they lose in their impurity and confusion much of their identity. At times, the one amounts to little more than small logic; the other, to little more than unnecessary tears. We must recognize the fact that they exist only in composite and adulterate forms.

Towards this complex resultant should be added of course a multitude of minor forces. Not least by any means is the man in whom the forces work, the liberated individual, who in successive generations since the Renaissance has grown increasingly conscious of self, of his majestic destiny,—to make fit ancestry for the modern superman. Beautifully simple, then, as the development may appear viewed in one of its phases, it becomes startlingly complicated when we view it as a composite inheritance, not only of ourselves, but in some measure of everyone since those momentous sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We have to recognize the astonishing fact that the process set in motion by Erasmus is responsible for both Francis Bacon and William Jennings Bryan.

My contention, then, in brief, is that the greater part of our thought begins abruptly with the Renaissance,* that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been the chief source of that thought, and that to understand this source and the literature which reflects it our students must become familiar with the two greatest informing forces of those centuries—the Classics and the King James Bible. To teach English literature to young men and women ignorant of these things is like teaching the wool business to a man who doesn't know a sheep from a goat.

So far I have concerned myself only with certain arguments in favor of the study of the Bible and the Classics as *literary backgrounds*. Arguments in favor of them for their own sakes—and I believe that there is still much to be said on that score—are not our affair in the present discussion. But, whatever the grounds on which they are taught, the question of *how* they are taught is obviously of vital interest to the English teacher. Details of method I shall have to leave largely to discussion, for the half-hour at my disposal has nearly run its course, but I should like, in conclusion, to venture a few suggestions.

First, the teaching of the Classics. The reasons I have advanced in favor of them imply not only a familiarity with the language, in order to appreciate the style of English writings, but also a knowledge of a far wider range of reading than can reasonably be covered in the original texts. This second implication at once demands a great deal of reading in translation,—a more widely extended reading, to include, let us say, the chief authors, Greek and Latin, who made the background of Petrarch and Erasmus. This reading, moreover, should be accompanied by much

* It is a contradiction of terms, of course, to say that any *development* begins *abruptly*; one must not lose sight of the fact that both Renaissance and modern inheritances from the Middle Ages, especially as regards literary content, are considerable. At the same time, the modern world, except in the case of a few conscious students of the past, is curiously shut off, particularly in the direction and habit of its thought, from the intellectual experience of the thirteenth century.

discussion of the ideas set forth; the student must understand the experience of the Ancient World, and not only of the conventionally Classical periods, but of Alexandrian times. Clearly, only the more narrative portions of this reading and the simpler discussions can be put in the secondary school, but I feel that a good deal could be accomplished if the work were coordinated with history and if the teachers of the Classics would shift their emphasis. At present, in the majority of schools, grammar is given the chief emphasis, accurate reading of a few pages is given next place, and an understanding of how the Ancients lived, of how they thought and felt, is occasionally thrown in if there is time.

By this I do not mean that we should abandon study of the language, nor minimize it to a smattering. Personally, I should like to see more time given to the Classics, but, even with present schedules, much time could be gained if less devotion were paid to the disciplinary value of Latin grammar, if grammar were always taught as a means to an end. In a three-year course of four periods a week in the high school, practically the whole of the first year could be devoted to language, and half-time (or two periods a week) in subsequent years to language and the translation of original texts. The difficulty does not lie mainly in the disciplinary bogey, however; it lies partly in the college entrance requirements, which force a meticulous intimacy with irregular verbs; and in the lack of competent teachers of the Classics. The first of these difficulties can be eliminated if the colleges see fit. The second can be eliminated only when schools cease to delegate the teaching of the Classics to amiable young men and women who can teach nothing else, who know the grammar by heart, a little Cæsar, Virgil, and Cicero, and nothing else. In the college, Latin or Greek should be required, in my opinion, of all Freshmen preparing for the A. B. degree; and there, if the grammar fetish is not still set up, quite 50 per cent. of the course could be devoted to the reading and study of translated Classics.

It will be objected, I know, that such a course would spread itself too vaguely over a vast area. It would certainly not be an easy course to teach; the technique of it has not been worked out. But this same difficulty has confronted teachers in newer subjects, such as English and the Sciences. When English teachers discovered about a generation ago that they were really teaching a sort of Latin made easy, they set about making a vital interpretation of their subject; and when they found that the new interpretation left them without the old, comfortable technique, they struggled on towards a new technique. They are still struggling; their technique is still very crude; but it is certainly to their credit that they did not return in despair to the easy futilities of their youth. I maintain that the Classics, if they are to survive,

must be given a new interpretation in schools, with the emphasis on the ideas which they contain and the life which they shadow forth; and this interpretation means a new type of teacher and a new technique.

In the case of the Bible, we cannot rely, especially in public schools, on any definite instruction out side of the English class. Even in private schools, Bible instruction is usually so obscured by religious ends that the book does not take on the character of a human document. I have repeatedly found boys of eighteen, after five years of so-called "Bible Study," unaware that the Book of Ruth differed in purpose or style from the Book of Job. We must give time from the English allotment to the study of the Bible as literature, and we must force it by requirement into the schools.

Five-Minute Discussions

How Can the Student Secure a Knowledge of the Classics?

At the outset I wish to state that it is my belief that in any education that is to be both broad and deep, that is to possess, so to speak, both horizontal and vertical values, a knowledge of the classics must be a constituent element. Yet only a brief experience as a college instructor in literature is necessary to discover that it is futile to refer to the classics to illuminate any phase of our own literary history; from the average student the only response an instructor receives is an uncomprehending stare. This ignorance becomes all the more serious when we bear in mind the real nature of the loss sustained by the student through this prevalent neglect of the classics. As I see it, this loss is threefold.

A first-hand acquaintance with the actual content of classical literature would again and again vitalize the student's understanding of our literature. The study of Chaucer, of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and especially of the Augustans would be immeasurably enriched by such a knowledge. Appreciation of the finer mock-heroic flavor in *Hudibras*, in *The Battle of the Books*, in *The Rape of the Lock*, and in many a hilariously burlesque passage of Fielding must now depend on some instructor's spoon-feeding. This is but a makeshift, and a pretty contemptible one.

More serious is the fact that a student is without a knowledge that would, to his profit, infinitely lengthen his historic perspective.

Ignorance now threatens to narrow his consciousness of our cultural history, to foster his indifference to origins, and to destroy his sense of spiritual and intellectual sympathy with the greatest of races. Even a man who voted for Harding—I voted for the heroic vanquished—must agree with President Wilson: "Your enlightenment depends on the company you keep. You do not know the world until you know the men who have possessed it and tried its wares, before you were given your brief run upon it." And in this realization that he is the humble inheritor of this ancient culture is, I feel assured, an excellent discipline for the assertive student of our time. It chastens the flippant and unintelligent individualism that loathes nothing so much as to be reminded of its duty to respect the past.

The student suffers still another loss: the power to understand and to enjoy those finer qualities that are the soul of classic art—balance, reticence, and the serene beauty of disciplined emotion. It is only a sense for the abiding charm of these qualities that can counteract the appeal of so much that is meretricious—the jazz, the punch, the pep—in contemporary art. In literature this plebeian passion for excess appears as a brutal realism or a languorous romanticism; in painting as the geometric fervors of the cubists; in music as the cacophonous literalism of the compositions that are now coming out of Russia and Italy. Surely something would seem to be at fault in the education of a student who does not protest—to use Pater's admirable phrase—"against the stupidity which is dead to the substance and the vulgarity which is dead to form."

I regret these losses because I feel that the study of literature always rests on the edge of an intellectual precipice; it may fall into a shallow impressionism or into an over-much concern about mere books, dates, and biographies. The larger—may I say?—the nobler correlations possible (such as might be assured with a training in the classics), the stronger the expectation that the study of literature will be kept in the realm of ideas. I feel that advanced courses in English especially should, if possible, have in them something of the point of view of comparative literature, some suggestion that tendencies that have appeared in English, have had parallels in other countries and at other times. Dean West has said: "And no education is the best which does not aim at universality, which does not acquaint the student with all the great categories, very few in number, which we must master, if we are to understand ourselves and our world in origin and progress." Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we must confess that among English students there is an amazing ignorance of such general conceptions as sentimentalism, optimism, pessimism, individualism. How many graduates in English can tell when, how, and why these

tendencies have manifested themselves in our literature? Literature is supposed to be a criticism of life, but yet there is only a half-knowledge of those general terms that describe fundamental and recurrent attitudes toward human experience.

These are the values that the student loses by his neglect of the classics. Where are we to look for help to remedy this condition? Ironically enough, not to the teachers of Greek and Latin. They have had their opportunity, and the majority have failed miserably. Too many are mired in Alexandrianism, and do not communicate the spirit of their subject. Not for adventitious reasons, mental discipline, training in logic, philological practice, must the classics be studied; one does not examine *The Last Judgment* or *Mona Lisa* to secure knowledge of the composition of the pigments. Most pungently a distinguished Latinist of this University has said: "I should no more think of studying those languages purely for mental discipline than of marrying a wife purely for character-building and the development of Stoic fortitude." With an unsparing sense of reality, Milton puts the case thus: "And though a linguist should pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into, yet if he have not studied the solid things in them as well as the words and lexicons, he were nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother-dialect only." The point is that the classics must be studied as a source for ideas if we would not do a profound injustice to their creators by putting them to a use for which they were not intended. But enough of this matter about which I feel very strongly and about which so much more might be said. Perhaps I should add, however, that I do not speak as an outsider, but as an alienated friend of the classics, for it was in this field that I began my teaching.

The remedy I have to suggest is not original. It has already been adopted in some colleges and universities. English departments must give courses in the classics in translation. I am perfectly aware of the inadequacy of a translation as compared with the original. But can we believe that a student who pieces together a gawky translation by means of the dictionary, more successfully catches the subtle discriminations of his author? I doubt it. One advantage is evident; with the English department in charge, the work could readily be shaped to bear upon our own literature. Moreover, the loss, sustained by the use of translations, might be, and could be, repaired by a parallel examination of those arts in which less diminution of value was suffered, due to the conditions of study. The knowledge of the inner spirit, the soul of the classics, can be supplied by a course in Greek civilization, and especially of its art—vases, sculpture, and architecture. It is gratifying to discover with what vigor of interest a student is

attracted to these matters. No apology is necessary for such a correlation of literature and the plastic arts. The perception, on the part of the student of literature, of such a fundamental unity is the beginning of true education; to multiply perceptions of a similar character is to build the foundation of true culture. Until we bridge the gap between the ancient world and the student of our own time, we are cutting him off from a means of enriching his mind, cultivating his taste, and deepening his spiritual sympathies.

B. SPRAGUE ALLEN,

New York University

A Course in Classics in Translation

I wish to speak this morning on a Course in the Classics in Translation, a course which, I think, may be justified on the principle that if the mountain will not come, to Mohamet Mohamet must go to the mountain. If the students in our colleges will not study the classics in the original languages, we, as educators, must take the classics of Greece and Rome to them in our own language. The increasing number of courses in the classics in translation seems to show that this generation is interested in the classics and is willing to make an honest effort to understand them when they are presented in this form. In view of this fact I feel it would not be out of place to discuss briefly the purpose and content of such courses. They should not be considered as substitutes for the study of the literature of Greece and Rome in the original languages, but should rather be considered as courses of study for those who do not understand the languages or have not advanced to such a point that they could profit by reading the works of the ancients in the original. Although something of what we may call the original genius of the literature, a sort of intangible flavor, is lost in the study of these works in translation, nevertheless we have sufficient translations in English which are good both in fidelity to the original and in reproduction of the spirit of the work to make such a course worth while.

The authors to be read and the extent of the reading in such a course as this will depend largely upon the amount of time allotted to the course. The basic principle, however, should be kept in mind at all times: the course is to furnish literary back-

ground. It should not concern itself with the minutiae of scholarly criticism on the works studied; it should aim rather at knowledge and appreciation. For this reason I believe the student should be introduced to a number of the great works of antiquity, presented in some sort of logical order, rather than carried through a complete outline of Greek and Latin literature and made expert at names of authors of whose works we have only fragments. Such a course should concern itself with the epic, Homer and Virgil; with the drama, the great four of Greece, and Plautus and Terence of Rome; with non-dramatic poetry,—and here the Greek must necessarily be fragmentary, but the Romans are well represented by Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, and others; and with prose in its various fields, but especially in those of philosophy and oratory. A course built upon such a plan as this ought upon completion to have given the student something of what we vaguely term “literary background.”

This literary background, however, will have been only half constructed if the instructor fails to connect the ancient writers with those of our own tongue. A course in the classics in translation presents an excellent means of showing the influence of the classics on English literature and of broadening the student's knowledge of English writers. For instance: Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* at once suggests the reading of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*; Plautus' *Menaechmi*, Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*; Euripides' *Medea*, William Morris' *Life and Death of Jason*; the whole of Greek drama, Milton's *Samson Agonistes*; Plato's *Republic*, and Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*; Plutarch's *Moralia*, Bacon's *Essays*; and so on, for the list is long. If the student should happen to be familiar already with any of these, so much the better, for the process of learning is much aided by the coupling of the known and the unknown. Incidentally the student may frequently be led to wander in by-paths of literature which otherwise would lie neglected. Indeed, this second part of the course is of almost as great value as the first part, for it helps to reanimate the ancient literature which so many people think is dead.

To teach such a course as I have outlined the instructor should have special preparation, preparation which is based on a much broader foundation than that of a reading of the translations in the Bohn or Loeb libraries. He must be a student of the classics who has read widely in English literature, or a student of English literature who has read widely in the classics in the original. The instructor must know Greek and Latin, for he must have an adequate understanding of and feeling for the spirit of those languages and peoples. This I feel can be gained only through a study of the original works. For, if the course is to be more than

a mere reading of a required number of books in English, the instructor must supply, as best he can, those elements which will produce what we usually call a classical atmosphere.

In this connection and in conclusion I wish to quote a few sentences from Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *On the Art of Reading*. He says: "But, although a student of English literature be ignorant of Greek and Latin as languages, may he not have Greek and Latin literature widely opened to him by intelligent translations? The question has often been asked but I ask it again. May not *some* translations open a door to him by which he can see them through an atmosphere, and in that atmosphere the authentic gods walking: so that returning upon English literature he may recognize them there, too, walking and talking in a garden of values?" Sir Arthur's question is so framed as to demand an affirmative reply; and many of us agree with the affirmation.

F. M. K. FOSTER,

Delaware College

The Historical Development of Literature

It is your misfortune that I have no prepared speech. I felt sure I could recruit from the abundance of my predecessors; and, since we are here to discuss, it is perhaps as well that some of us should discuss. I therefore seize upon a remark of my good friend Hinchman's—"The greater part of our thought begins abruptly with the Renaissance." I think I could stage a very vigorous mock-combat with him over this point. It would be largely a mock-combat, since we could doubtless settle our apparent differences quite amicably in the course of a few minutes' conversation.

I am no believer in abrupt beginnings or abrupt endings—except in the case of five-minute speeches. I believe that our teaching of literary history suffers from the fact that it conveys to the minds of the students, by reason of necessary divisions into centuries, into periods, subjects, courses, a wholly wrong sense of beginnings and endings, and far too little of the more valuable sense of continuity. Among the many things which it might be desirable to teach in connection with literature there is at least one thing which we can teach, and that is the historical development of literature, its movement in time and place. This is not the only thing to be taught, nor necessarily the best thing, but it has always

seemed to me something very nearly essential, and at any rate it is teachable.

In the case of English literature I venture to think that we teach this historical development fairly well. And at precisely this point there is a striking contrast to what was my experience with the teaching of Latin. I terminated my study of Latin in college with a feeling that Latin literature—or perhaps rather the “classical” literature which found full expression in Greek and was echoed in Latin—was the perfect pearl in the otherwise rather commonplace oyster of this world. Apart from a conning of the grammar, the study of the classics seemed to concern itself so much with the reconstruction of ancient civilization—that is an inheritance from the Renaissance—with the topography of the Forum or the Acropolis, with the procedure of the law courts and the conduct of military campaigns, that it was only after a good many years’ study of modern literatures that I was able by myself to set up some sort of connection between them and those of the ancient world.

I feel, therefore, that this static view of classical literature, which seems to be the one which gets to the average student, however far removed such a view may be from that held by some excellent teachers of the classics, is a reason for the lamented absence of fruitful relations between what have come to be regarded as two separate and distinct subjects. I feel it to be a duty of teachers of English to establish such relations. I think it is the duty of somebody, somehow, to make clear the development of Latin literature somewhat after the fashion that the development of English literature is made clear. Then the relations between the two could quickly enough manifest themselves.

Is the student ever likely to hear, either in English courses or in Latin, that the Romans whom we know looked back with respect upon a classical literature about which we know very little? that Cicero felt at the outset of his career a deep sense of discouragement because the great days of oratory were over? that he met in his youth the last representative of the great Roman tragic tradition? that Vergil leaned heavily upon a great epic tradition of which we know only scraps? that Horace felt a superiority to his predecessor in satire, Lucilius, in one thing and one thing only—form, polish? Plainly, the Augustan Age of Queen Anne is Augustan by its intention, by its attitude, if not by its accomplishment.

Horace’s *Epistle to Augustus* is a plea for modern literature—how old does a poem have to be before it is good? Might not a student be made aware of the triumphant recognition which this modern literature secured for itself in the first century, of the universal admiration not only of Horace and Vergil, but of Seneca

and Lucan? Might he not advantageously hear something of the change of taste in the next century, and then of the rise of Christian poetry, so significant for a literature that contain Cædmon and Milton, of the work of the great formulators, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, in the fourth century, and of the epitomizers like Boethius, Gregory, and Isidore in the sixth? Would he not be interested to know something of the revival of letters under Charlemagne through the agency of Alcuin of York, projected against a background of the Irish contribution to European letters? Would it not be desirable for him to know that one reason why the study of literature did not better prosper in the medieval universities was, apart from unequal competition with commercial and in a sense scientific studies, the large amount of really good modern Latin literature which the twelfth and thirteenth centuries produced, good, that is, for the particular purposes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? So the story might be carried on with very considerable advantage to the student of Bacon and of Milton. I do not pretend to say how much of this should be taught, nor how, indeed, it should be taught, but if a student could have an opportunity to form some such concept as this, no matter how inadequately furnished with desirable detail it might here and there be, he would be in possession of a principle of thinking which would carry him further and faster, as opportunity presented itself, than he could possibly go without it; he would know where to place such information as he might later acquire.

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The Classics for their Own Sake

"Classics in the background" has a rather ominous sound, but after all it still leaves us a little space on the stage. However, if we are to serve our purpose there, we ought to know who is at the footlights. To drop the figure, the Classics cannot—and should not be asked to—aid High School English literature chiefly, nor even the required college English, which usually comes in the Freshman year. No foreign language, least of all an ancient one, can be mastered in time to provide a considerable grasp of its literature in the high school. If a foreign literature is to be mastered in time to serve the needs of the teacher of "required

English," we must resort to translations. Unfortunately, translations are very seldom literature—one has only to read Milton in Italian, Blake in French, or Keats in German to see how impossible that solution is.

The Classics are needed as a background for English, but it must be the English of the long years of reading in and after college. That is, after all, the time for which we are all preparing the pupil. As soon as we demand that our colleague's subject must be made to serve the immediate ends of our own courses in high school and college we are in danger of wrenching his work away from its proper object. Shall the mathematician be compelled to limit himself to trigonometry at the demands of engineering schools; or shall the biologist be confined to entymology to satisfy the agricultural department?

When this subject is discussed we often hear the criticism that the classics have been used too long as a language drill. This we are ready to confess and have, in fact, long confessed. We were formerly too prone to cling to leisurely methods devised at a time when the drill was followed by years of wide reading. Now the period at our disposal has been cut down. We have been compelled to telescope our course very much in consequence, and we have done so. I wish particularly to point to a custom now growing in our colleges of giving a large part of the college Sophomore (or even the Freshman) courses in Greek and Latin to a history of the literature. In such courses goodly selections of the best poetry and some prose are read in the original, while translations are used frankly to cover a bulk of material important for the content rather than form. Much of the tilting at would-be gerund-grinding is about twenty years out of date. In fact the classical teacher long ago found that he had to step into the breach left by his colleagues and teach Greek and Roman history, philosophy, religion, politics and economics, as well as literature. This leaves him little time for syntactical obscurities. I think it will be found that in our best schools and colleges the men in classics are now teaching the Greek and Latin literatures not as curious repositories of ablatives and subjunctives but as artistic expressions of human thought and feeling.

There is a point at which you can aid us to get better results. A large number of the school superintendents and principals of to-day have been brought up by schools of pedagogy which are tainted with the modern utilitarian doctrines of education. They are not giving literature its due. To be specific, they are doing their utmost to kill the classics by putting this work into the hands of inferior teachers. You can help us by insisting that in your schools the teacher of language and literature be as carefully selected and as highly paid as those of other branches.

Finally, I beg that we all adopt the broad platform of education. We cannot do justice to our subject if we must get quick results for the use of other departments. We wish, as you do, to give our students a solid foundation upon which they can continue to build securely for a life time.

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